

JOURNAL OF THE SENATE [September 7, 1977]

STATE OF WISCONSIN

Senate Journal

Eighty-Third Regular Session

WEDNESDAY, September 7, 1977.

9:45 A.M.

The senate met.

The senate was called to order by Fred A. Risser, president pro tempore of the senate.

By request of Senator Bablitch, with unanimous consent, the calling of the roll was dispensed with.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

The committee on Commerce reports and recommends:

Senate Bill 249

Relating to safe driving practices courses and granting rule-making authority.

Introduction of senate amendment 2:

Ayes, 7 -- Senators Parys, Berger, Swan, Goyke, Keppler, Bidwell and Petri;

Noes, 0 -- None.

Senate Bill 476

Relating to measurement of loss for property insurance.

Introduction of senate amendment 2:

Ayes, 7 -- Senators Parys, Berger, Swan, Goyke, Keppler, Bidwell and Petri;

Noes, 0 -- None.

RONALD G. PARYS
Chairman

AMENDMENTS OFFERED

Senate amendment 1 to **Assembly Bill 232** by Senator Bablitch, by request of Representatives Schmidt and Groshek.

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By request of Senator Bablitch, with unanimous consent, the chair was directed to appoint members to escort the Governor.

The chair appointed Senators Bablitch and Sensenbrenner to escort the Governor to the Assembly Chambers.

Upon motion of Senator Bablitch the senate adjourned until 9:00 A.M. Thursday, September 8, upon the rising of the joint convention.

The Senate proceeded in a body to the Assembly Chamber to meet in Joint Convention to receive the Governor's message.

9:50 A.M.

IN ASSEMBLY CHAMBER
IN JOINT CONVENTION

The Senate president pro tempore in the chair.

The committee to await upon the Governor appeared with his excellency, the Governor, who delivered his message as follows:

President pro tem Risser, Speaker Jackamonis, ladies and gentlemen of the 83rd Wisconsin Legislature, distinguished guests and citizens of Wisconsin.

I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to address this Joint Session of the Legislature.

As many of you know, for me, becoming Governor was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. This September session will be the first opportunity for all of you and me to work together on the challenges facing the State of Wisconsin. This morning I want to convey to you some of my immediate and longer range Legislative priorities, so that all of you may be more aware of my goals. We must take extra efforts in these early days so that the newness of our relationship does not prevent us from making full and effective use of the time remaining in this Legislative term.

I realize that the beginning of a month-long floor session, with the Biennial Budget enacted only three months ago, is not a usual time for the Governor to request to speak to the Legislature. But events of the last five months in Wisconsin government have themselves been far from usual. Even on the actual day of transition, I was faced with a difficult succession of events which demanded immediate attention and immediate decisions.

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Hoping to ensure the wisdom of those decisions, I sought wise counsel. Solomon, the authority on Governance and Human Relations in his own day, in Proverbs defines wisdom as "knowing and doing right, and common sense."

With that guidance, I have and will continue to make decisions-based not on expediency or politics--but grounded instead in common sense and what I believe is right.

This same approach is reflected in my legislative and policy concerns.

Recent years in Wisconsin have witnessed a massive amount of policy change and redirection in state government. Today, several of those initiatives are only partially completed while others have caused extreme divisiveness.

Despite the many important accomplishments of recent years, citizens feel we should be more concerned about the needs and problems of individuals and families.

Wisconsin citizens also sense that their government could be operating more smoothly.

Common sense tells us that to earn and maintain citizen confidence, state government must be as effective as possible in its operations. It seems to me, then, that common sense also dictates that resolving these government operations issues should be our most immediate concern in September.

Heading my list for this session are four issues which must be acted upon in September in order to solve specific problems for the upcoming year. Failure to act will further erode citizen confidence in state government's ability to anticipate and resolve problems.

First, of extreme importance for September, is legislation making refinements in the Farm Land Preservation program enacted earlier this year. It is clear at this point that certain technical and timing changes will be necessary in September if the program is to begin providing tax credits to farmers next year, as the Legislature intended. Refinements are also needed to improve administration and facilitate enrollments in the program.

Second, because of recent modifications in federal tax policy, including increases in federal standard deduction and low income allowances, a substantial number of Wisconsin taxpayers, especially low and moderate income families, will have higher state than federal tax liabilities. For example, in 1977 approximately 150,000

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Wisconsin residents with no federal tax liability were required to pay a Wisconsin income tax. I ask that the state income tax be modified to reduce this disparity and the burden which it imposes on a growing number of Wisconsin citizens.

This is one of the few inequities in our state tax structure which can be addressed without major adjustments in other parts of the system and without a significant loss in revenue. However, it must be passed in September in order to provide taxpayers with the benefits when they file 1977 tax returns.

Of course, a major analysis of the tax system is necessary before we consider significant tax reform in Wisconsin. You have approved funding for a tax burden study to be conducted by the Department of Revenue. The results of this study must be known and analyzed before a sound and responsible tax reform proposal can be considered by the Legislature and the Governor.

The third initiative involves the important subject of levy limits. Under existing law, municipalities must reduce their 1977 levies, collected in 1978, by an amount equal to any increase in state shared revenue payments. Unless the Legislature eliminates this provision, a number of municipalities will be prohibited from increasing their levies, or be authorized only a negligible increase. Furthermore, a few communities will actually be required to levy a smaller amount in 1977 than they did in 1976. Ironically, this situation is produced by the very generous amounts of shared revenue payments which municipalities will receive in 1978. Therefore, I am proposing that municipalities be allowed to determine their levies without being handicapped by this excessive requirement. To have any impact, however, this modification must also be enacted in September.

I make this proposal in an effort to alleviate an immediate problem and allow us the time to consider changes in other aspects of levy limits. Having addressed this immediate problem, I hope I will not be faced this session with the need to veto an outright repeal of levy limits.

The fourth issue of critical importance for September is campaign finance reform. It is essential that we complete work on the public financing bill to allow the law to take effect in the next statewide elections. Timely action will at last allow us to reduce the disproportionate influence a few large contributors might have on an election and reduce the likelihood that anyone could "buy" elective office in Wisconsin.

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Also of importance to me this session is legislation to make meaningful improvements in our civil service system, which was introduced recently at my request. Almost all of the changes in that bill grew out of the findings of the Employment Relations Study Commission which began its work a year and a half ago.

An effective civil service system has been a primary reason that Wisconsin has earned and maintained a national reputation for clean and efficient government. As Chief Executive, I am acutely aware that the future quality of state government will depend to a very great degree on how we respond to the shortcomings which have developed in that civil service system, as identified by the Stevens-Offner Commission.

My concern today is not to explain the specific merits of that bill. Rather, I want you to know that I feel meaningful changes in our civil service system are fundamental to whatever else we hope to accomplish in state government.

I am also extremely concerned about legislative consideration of implementing legislation for court reorganization authorized by constitutional amendment earlier this year. Pressures do exist for the rapid passage of appellate court legislation. The question of court reorganization is complex; our answer must be comprehensive. The pressure to meet a deadline must not overshadow the fact that court reorganization is a once in a lifetime responsibility.

Another area of concern for this session is a group of three bills which can earn increased public confidence in government by making government operations more open and less subject to special interest pressures. We must complete work on pending legislation which will increase access to public records, tighten restrictions on lobbying and make further improvements in our ethics code for public officials.

In the area of health care, I feel strongly about the need to give the state effective tools for enforcing state nursing home regulations. Many of our past enforcement problems have stemmed from the fact that it is more profitable for an unscrupulous operator to ignore regulations than to comply with them. Legislation pending in the Assembly will at last reverse this situation, as well as create a more timely and effective enforcement system.

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Consistent with my recent statements regarding the excessive proportion of alcohol-related fatalities on Wisconsin highways, I will strongly support tough legislation which will deal with drunk driving offenses. Our current implied consent law falls far short of its mark as a deterrent to drinking drivers. We are working with the Department of Transportation, the Governor's Office on Highway Safety Coordination, The Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse, and The Wisconsin Association on Alcoholism to propose changes in the implied consent law which will stem the alarming rise in the number of traffic fatalities due to drunk driving.

A final governmental operations initiative for which I ask your consideration in September is legislation to allow us to better manage the issuance of state debt. Although a Joint Executive-Legislative Committee is proposed in the legislation, other alternatives may be considered. What is important, however, is that we establish a method for comprehensive debt management as soon as possible. New initiatives which may involve additional bonding are already on the horizon.

One issue we almost certainly face by next year is the problem of financing state and local efforts at maintaining and improving water quality. The challenge and the need is enormous. We cannot depend on federal support alone to do the job. The ripple effects of this problem affect not only the environment, but housing cost, industry, urban development, tourism and transportation as well. The magnitude and form of this program are yet to be determined, but we can safely assume it will be before us next year.

Also involving the question of bonding is legislation creating a housing conservation and rehabilitation program, which should be ready for approval by January. This program could be critical to helping low income families improve their housing, as well as helping elderly people keep their homes in livable condition. The first draft of the bill is ready for introduction now, and further refinements will be made as reactions are received from the public and private sectors.

Also being developed for consideration beyond this session is legislation to control Medicaid fraud and abuse, to further refine levy limits, to address additional mining issues, to expand opportunities for the elderly and to respond to problems in the area of criminal justice. The introduction of legislation in several other areas will depend on the progress of policy formulations.

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Despite the major policy issues addressed in recent years by this Legislature, the agenda before us now is even more challenging and complex.

In today's world, no program will solve all it hopes to solve; and no solution can be considered permanent. In this environment of change and limits, we must rely even more on creativity and open-mindedness in confronting new developments.

As a former member of this body, I understand the pressures you must bear and know the difficult decisions you will face. I hope you can grant me a similar understanding and tolerance.

I look forward to working with all of you, in this session and in sessions to come, to serve the citizens of Wisconsin--as I pledged in my oath-taking ceremonies--with commitment, compassion and, above all, common sense.



The joint convention rose and the senate stood adjourned.

10:20 A.M.